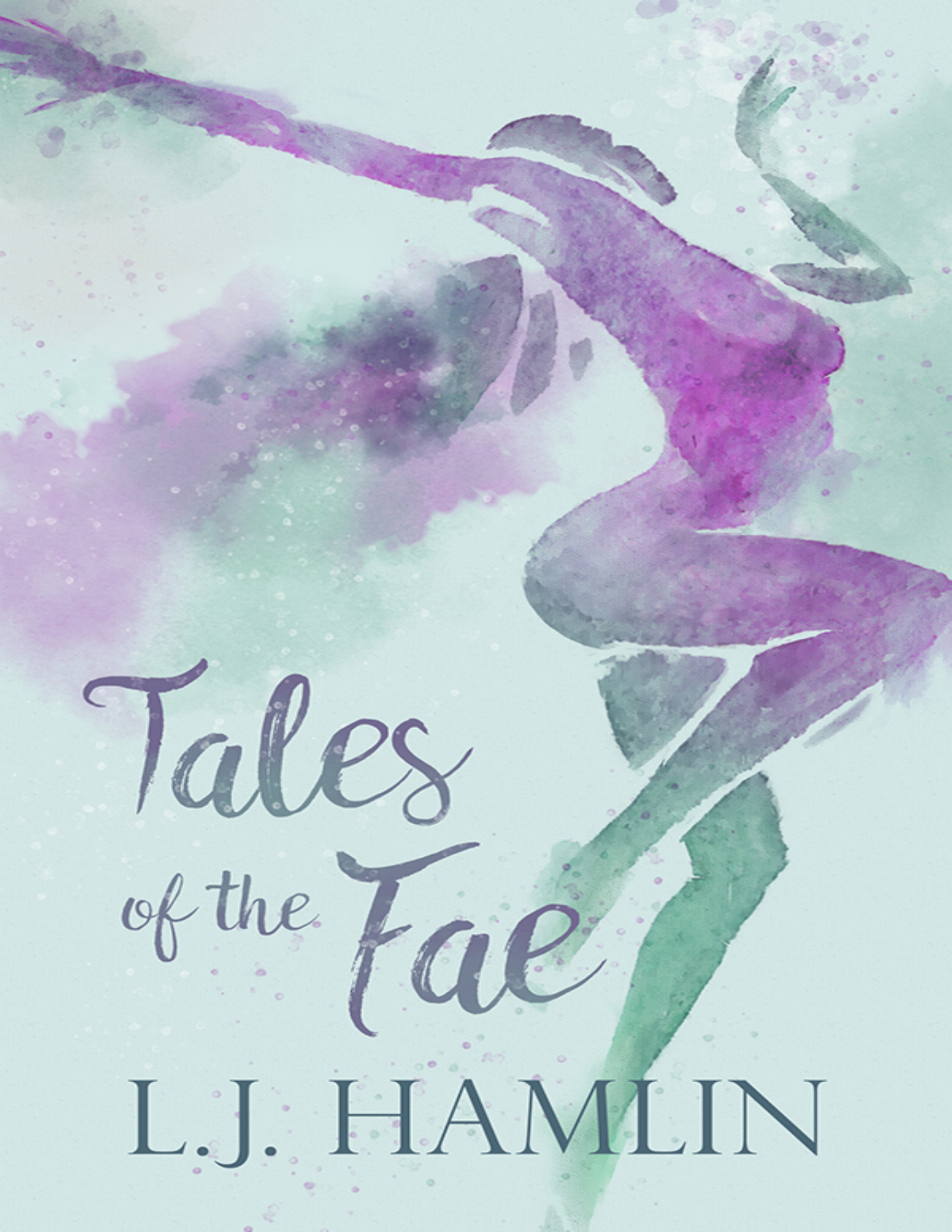
Tales
of the Fae
L.J. HAMLIN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Tales of the Fae
Book Details
Dedication
Hearts in Motion
Ode to the Forest Fae
The Fae by the Lake
About the Author

Tales of the Fae

L.J. HAMLIN

A trio of tales about magic, faeries, and women falling in love...

Hearts in Motion is the tale of a shy yeti shifter who prefers to keep to herself, and the faerie artist who coaxes her out...

Ode to the Forest Fae is about a forest faerie who's woken up by a song, and intrigued by the stuttering girl singing it.

The Fae by the Lake tells about a photographer who takes a tumble into a lake, and the intriguing creature who saves her life.

Tales of the Fae

By L.J. Hamlin

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To all the magical women in my life, thank you, keep being exactly as you are

Hearts in Motion

Walking into the gallery, brightly lit with amazing art on the walls, Alice is almost glad she came. She can be a little bit of a hermit, and she likes her cabin in the woods. But her best friend, Bastian, had convinced her she would love this art show. Alice has always had a love for art.

"So who are we here to see, again?" Alice asks.

"An artist who draws nudes in nature. They're a fairy," Bastian says casually.

Alice feels like she's been hit in the stomach. "What? Bastian, I never thought I'd hear you call a gay person that," Alice says, shaking.

Alice had been friends with Bastian since elementary school. He stuck by her through the few hard times and was the cause of a lot of the good times, which was why thinking he'd used a gay slur had made her feel sick. Bastian was the first person she had come out to as a lesbian, and he'd never been mean about it before.

"Oh, no. No, I'm sorry. She's a fairy, Alice. A real fairy, like I'm a real kitsune," Bastian explains, looking horrified at the confusion caused by his words.

"She's one of the fae?" Alice asks, relieved. She herself is a shifter, but she's never met a fairy. Their small town by the forest attracts a lot of supernatural beings due to the energy of the forest, and they've made a safe community here, but Alice doesn't come into town much. She's sure otherwise she'd notice a fairy. Their kind are beautiful, often powerful, and not to be messed with.

"Yes. Let me show you some of her art and then maybe introduce you," Bastian suggests. He still looks a little sheepish.

"You know her?" Alice asks, following Bastian deeper into the rooms.

"Did I not tell you? I've talked with her a few times."

"You definitely didn't tell me," Alice says, but forgets why it matters as they come to another painting. She stops in her tracks.

The painting is beautiful. It depicts a black woman lying nude in a bed of red flowers, petals all over her skin, the long lines of her arms and the curve of her hip all perfectly captured.

"Do you like this one?" Bastian asks.

"Yes. Her style is amazing. The woman looks alive and the flowers real." Alice isn't an art expert, but she can recognise skill when she sees it, and this artist is highly skilled.

"This is why I spoke to her. I'm buying this piece. It's mine after the show," Bastian explains.

"It'll look amazing in your home. Maybe I'll buy something, too. Can we look at the rest?" Slice asks.

"Yes, let's look around."

They move from beautiful painting to beautiful painting, some depicting women, other men, some androgynous figures, some leaving gender up to interpretation. It's clear the artist doesn't have a gender she won't capture in her work.

Alice is gazing at a red-headed woman entwined with vines when she feels someone beside her, and she glances to the side and then looks again. The woman beside her is beautiful and makes Alice, with her brown braids and grey eyes and simple clothes, feel plain.

This woman's long, flowing hair is pink, starting out a dark magenta at the roots and changing shade every few inches, getting lighter till it ends in a pale, cotton candy pink. Her eyes are a clear blue, her skin like porcelain, and she has a pair of gossamer wings growing out of her back, poking through slits in her simple but stunning forest-green dress.

"Lily, so good to see you," Bastian says happily. He reaches past Alice and shakes Lily's hand. His skin is a few shades darker than Alice's skin from her Jewish heritage, and next to Lily, Bastian's skin looks even darker, and the fairy's skin seems to glow white.

"Hello, Bastian. Who is your beautiful friend?" Lily asks, and Alice startles. She's no troll and has gotten attention from women before—and dated several in her thirty years—but Lily is gorgeous. And given how stunning all the subjects of her paintings are, it's hard to believe she'd see Alice as beautiful.

"This is my very best friend, Alice. I'm sure she'll be too shy to say, but she loves your art," Bastian says, nudging Alice in the ribs.

"Hello. Yes, it's my first time seeing it, but I'm very impressed." Alice manages to get her words out without sounding too much like a nervous child asking out their first sweetheart.

"Thank you, Alice," Lily says, offering her hand, and Alice takes it. She doesn't think she imagines the sparks she feels.

"I would like to draw you sometime," Lily says in a soft lilting voice. It's like music.

"What, me? And like that?" Alice says looking to the perfect curvy redhead with a hand over her groin and arm over her breasts.

"If you're not comfortable with nudity, we can work up to that. I'd be honoured to draw you," Lily says with a warm smile.

"Now that's an offer you don't get every day," Bastian says with a smirk. He can be such a schoolboy at times.

"Why don't you go get us some drinks from the bar, Bastian. Lily, what would you like?" Alice asks. She loves Bastian like a brother, but she's keen to get rid of him for a few moments.

"A white wine pinot grigio, please," Lily says brightly.

"And a beer pilsner for me. Off you go." Alice nudges Bastian, and he'd been raised with manners. He'd never refuse to get someone a drink who asked.

Alice doesn't speak until after Bastian is out of earshot.

"Do you really want to draw me?" Alice asks.

"If you'd be comfortable enough. Not only is your physical presence impressive, I'd like to capture your energy, too. Not to be rude, but I can tell you're a shifter but not what kind?" Lily asks.

"Um, I'm a Yeti shifter," Alice admits. Her kind is rare and often lives in isolation. Alice sometimes feels a little embarrassed by her other form. She's a myth to humans, something to be laughed at if you believe in them.

"I have never drawn a yeti before." Lily sounds intrigued.

"I've never met a fairy before," Alice says, surprised by the flirtation in her voice. She's attracted to Lily, an instant pull, but it's unlike her to flirt

so soon or easily.

"If I give you my number, could we arrange for me to draw you?" Lily asks.

"I'm not sure. As much as being part of your art would be an honour, I'm a little shy," Alice admits.

"You could use some silk to cover yourself so that you're not completely nude. I don't wish for you to be uncomfortable, but I do think we could make something beautiful together," Lily says softly. She's not being pushy, and Alice has a feeling if she says no that Lily will still be kind and full of smiles. Alice might still have a chance with her. She doesn't want to say no, though. She wants to be daring.

"I could do that. Do you have a cell phone, so I can give you my number?" Alice asks.

"I do." Lily has a small bag with her, and she takes her cell phone from that and hands it to Alice, who programs her number and hands it back just as Bastian comes back over with their drinks.

"Thank you," Alice says, taking her glass, trying to send the message with her eyes to Bastian not to make a big deal about her passing Lily back her phone.

"Very kind of you." Lily takes her glass and sips daintily, the perfect cupid's bow of her mouth making Alice's stomach flutter.

"How are you two getting on?" Bastian asks.

"Very well, but I'm afraid I must work and talk to all the people here. I would much rather spend my time in your company. I'll try to see you both again before you leave." Lily smiles at them both, and when she walks away, she brushes her hand against Alice's fingers. She might be getting her hopes up, but she feels like Lily may well be interested in her as more than just an art subject.

"Did I interrupt something?" Bastian asks.

"No. Maybe. I don't know. She has my number, so it's in her hands." Alice thinks maybe it's better that way, as she would have driven herself insane deciding when the right time to call was. She knows there are rules when it comes to calling people when they give you their number, but she's never really known them.

"You like her, though. That's why you gave her your number?" Bastian asks.

"It might be nothing. She might just want to draw me. It looks like she likes to paint all kinds of body shapes and sizes, skin colours, hair. Maybe she just finds me interesting in that way." Alice sighs.

"And what if it is more, and she's interested in you?" Bastian presses.

"I'm not sure," Alice says, taking a sip of her beer.

"You haven't had a date in a while." Bastian raises an eyebrow.

"Hush. It hasn't been that long," Alice argues.

"If you say so." Bastian smirks.

"Come, let's look at more of the art," Alice says.

They circle through the rooms a few times, and Alice catches flashes of pink hair and wings. Each time she feels a thrill.

Eventually, though, she starts to get tired, and Bastian suggests leaving.

Like she knows, Lily appears. "I wanted to see you before you left. Did you enjoy the show?" Lily asks.

"Yes, everything was so beautiful," Alice says, and she speaks of more than the art.

"I'll call you," Lily says and kisses Alice's cheek lightly in goodbye. Bastian says something about picking up his painting, and they leave. Alice still feels a little stunned from the simple kiss to her cheek. She'd swear she can still feel the pressure of lips on her skin.

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The phone ringing surprises Alice. She'd been working, translating ancient manuscripts into other languages, and she'd been absorbed. She doesn't recognise the number on her phone and answers, hoping it isn't some scam call trying to sell her something or ask her if she's been in an accident.

"Hello?" Alice asks.

"Hello, this is Lily from the art show. Do you remember me?" Lily asks in her soft but slightly husky voice.

It's been three days since the art show, and Alice has thought of little else, but she doesn't want to sound too keen and scare Lily off.

"I remember you. Bastian told me he picked up his painting yesterday. He's still very impressed, as am I," Alice says, and she feels like she's in high school, trying to act cool on the phone to a cute girl.

"Would you be free this week for me to take some sketches? I have a wonderful painting in mind if you still agree to sit for me," Lily says.

"I work from home, so I can schedule things around you as I have no urgent deadlines at the moment. What day would be best for you, and where do you want to meet?" Alice asks, nervous and excited.

"Bastian said you have a home in the forest. Could we meet there, if it's not imposing? It's just I love the forest so. To be within it while I draw, with the energy of nature around me, I would like that. Is tomorrow too soon?" Lily sounds genuinely pleased by the idea of a home in the forest. Alice is used to people complaining that her home is out of the way and hard to find and too far a drive.

"I'd love that. I like the energy here, too." Alice can't believe that Lily is going to come to her house. She needs to clean up.

"Can you send me directions?" Lily asks.

"Yes, of course. I'll text them to you, but it's not too hard to find. It's the only house for miles," Alice replies.

"I'll see you tomorrow. I'm really looking forward to drawing you," Lily says softly.

Alice is about to say goodbye when she decides to be daring. If she doesn't say this now, she might never say it. "Would you like to have dinner while we're here?"

"I'd love that. It's not too much trouble?"

"No, I love to cook, and the company would be great. I'd like to hear more about you and your art." Alice almost bites through her lip, she's so worried about Lily's reaction.

"I like to get to know all my muses. I'll admit you have me more intrigued than most. Is that okay to say? I don't want you to feel uncomfortable, especially if I'm going to be drawing you. I want you to be comfortable with me, but I believe in being direct, and I must say you fascinate me," Lily says, and Alice's heart does a weird flip in her chest.

"So, we could consider tomorrow a sort of getting to know each other date as well as an art session?" Alice asks, and she actually crosses her fingers, hoping and wishing as hard as she can that things go her way.

"I like the sound of that. Oh, one last request?" Lily asks, and Alice is so happy she's going to have to stop herself from agreeing to anything Lily asks. Alice has had some weird requests from dates before, especially when she tried online dating. She has friends who tried online dating, and it's worked wonders. They've even found their spouse. Alice was just unlucky. She got the strange people who asked for nudes ten times before they even said hello.

"Um, of course?" Alice hopes she's not being a fool.

"Could you wear your hair down for our session? I love the chestnut colour. I'd love to see it free." Lily sounds so relaxed and happy, it makes Alice feel more relaxed, too.

"I can do that. What time do you want to meet tomorrow?" Alice asks.

"Can we meet at eleven? I have a few errands to do in the morning, but I'll be on time," Lily says brightly.

"Eleven is great. I'll see you then." Alice tries not to sound as giddy with excitement as she really is but doesn't want to sound too disinterested.

"Tomorrow. I'll let you get back to your day," Lily says, and they say their goodbyes, even though Alice would happily stay on the phone.

Once the call has ended, Alice saves Lily's number. Then she gets up and looks around her open-plan home. Everything but the bathroom and her bedroom are in one space, which makes it quite social but also means there's no place to hide any mess, so she has to clean properly.

Her place isn't that messy, but Alice goes over everything, making sure there isn't dust or anything embarrassing on show, no pictures she doesn't want Lily to see on a first date. Alice goes back to her desk once she's happier with how her home looks and tries to resume working. It's hard to focus on the words with thoughts of Lily in her head, but she manages to regain her focus and get back to work.

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The knock on the door startles Alice even though she's expecting Lily. She straightens her sweater and goes to answer the door. Lily's standing there, just as pretty as before, holding sketch pads and bags, lots of art supplies. Alice reaches out right away to help Lily get everything inside and set down, and then closes the door.

"Hi. I'm glad you got here okay," Alice says, hoping her smile isn't too dorky.

"You sent good directions, and there are no other houses to get confused with close by. I have to say your house is in a beautiful spot and absolutely lovely," Lily says with a kind smile.

"I love it out here," Alice says. This forest is her home. She can run in it in both her human and yeti form without people staring and taking pictures.

"Should we set up in here? I have the silk and some extra cushions. I really like this space, it's so light and airy. I can see why you like it," Lily says, looking around the room and seeming impressed.

"In here is perfect, but would you like a drink first? A coffee?" Alice asks, trying to remember her manners instead of just staring at Lily. She looks somehow at home in Alice's space, despite being more delicate and petite than Alice's taste in furniture and style.

"I don't drink coffee, but a glass of water would be lovely." Lily starts to go through her bags.

Alice goes and pours two glasses of water and sets them on the coffee table close to where Lily's arranging pillows and silk. She's a little like a whirlwind, always in motion, and Alice likes it. She likes how alive Lily seems to be, and she'd bet money that Lily always goes after what she wants without second guessing herself.

"I, ah, guess I should undress?" Alice asks.

"I have a robe you can wear while I'm not drawing so you don't get cold." Lily takes a robe out of the bag and hands it over.

"I'll be right back," Alice promises. She goes to her bedroom, quickly undresses, and puts on the robe before joining Lily again, who seems to have mostly everything set up, sketchbooks and pencils, pillows and silk.

"Thank you for wearing your hair down. It looks lovely. Are you ready to start?" Lily asks.

"I think I'm ready," Alice says, coming closer to the nest of pillows on her floor.

"Don't be nervous. Every person has a beautiful body. If you have scars or stretch marks or any part of your body you don't like, it won't bother me. Everything the goddess creates is beautiful as it is." Lily means her words. Alice can tell that Lily isn't just making platitudes to get her way.

"I don't hate any part of my body, but I don't feel as beautiful as the people in your art," Alice admits.

"You're radiant, and you'll see that when I finish your painting. But first, sketches with you here, and then I'll work on the rest alone," Lily says.

"How do you want me?" Alice asks, only blushing a little at her words and how they sound.

Lily takes her hand and leads Lily to the pillows and encourages her to lie down. Lily apologises every time she moves Alice's limbs without asking first, but Alice doesn't mind, and she lets herself be moved like a doll, the silk draped over her and the gown removed.

Alice tries to relax on the pillows as Lily moves away a little and takes a seat on a cushion, sketch book in front of her.

"Am I allowed to talk?" Alice asks.

"Yes, of course. I'll only need you to stop for a few moments when I draw your face," Lily says brightly.

"Okay. Do I look okay?" Alice asks.

"You look like a dream," Lily says, and mouth curving in a soft, warm smile.

They talk as Lily draws. She asks questions, like how Alice came to live here, about her work and family, and tells Alice about her own, about art school and coming to move into this town because of the more open nature of the supernatural here. She likes getting to be herself without humans staring.

They talk for hours. Lily lets Alice move into different positions and to stop for a drink and work out any aches. When she gets a crick in her neck,

Lily puts down her sketch pad and comes over to massage Alice's neck, and Alice has to hold in a moan because Lily's hands are the best thing she's ever felt on her skin.

They keep going a little longer after that, and then Alice goes and gets dressed, and they move into the kitchen. Alice makes them herbal tea, and Lily offers to help with cooking dinner and won't take no for an answer, so they start chopping vegetables and preparing everything.

"So was being drawn as traumatising as you thought it'd be?" Lily asks.

"No. It was actually nice and peaceful, and I liked talking with you. Would you like a glass of wine?" Alice asks, getting a bottle out of the fridge, remembering at the art show that Lily had liked white wine.

"I don't like to drink and drive, but I suppose if you didn't mind, I could stay on your couch for the night?" Lily says with an almost impish smile as she steps into Alice's space.

"I wouldn't mind. I enjoy your company," Alice admits. They're standing so close, it'd be easy to touch Lily, but Alice isn't sure that's what Lily wants. She's asked to stay, but she suggested the couch, not Alice's bed.

"You're frowning. What has you so worried?" Lily asks, and she places one of her hands on Alice's waist, bringing them closer together, hips almost touching.

"I'm not very good at this. I have a crush on you, Lily. I was attracted to you the minute I saw you, and then you come here and tell stories about fostering kittens for the local vets and liking to walk in the woods, swim in lakes, and it's like you're perfect."

"Those sound like reasons to be happy. You like me for more than my looks. I like you, too." Lily draws a pattern of a flower with her finger on Alice's arm, and it shows up in a trail of glitter than soon disappears, a little taste of fairy magic.

"I'm happy now I know you like me, too," Alice admits.

Lily leans up and in and presses a quick kiss on Alice's lips before pirouetting away like a dancer and going to check the rice. Alice stands still for a moment, her lips tingling, and then she goes back to cooking before the vegetarian curry burns.

"So, um, wine?" Alice asks again.

"Yes, please." Lily nods, and Alice checks the heat of the flame under the curry before she goes and gets the wine glasses and fills them, setting one close to Lily and taking a drink from her own.

"I know I told you I like you, but it's still cool if you take the couch. No pressure to join me in bed," Alice says, blushing, but it needs to be said. This is their first date, and she doesn't want Lily to feel like she has to do anything. Some people are intimidated by Alice because she's a yeti shifter, because that means she's exceptionally strong, and they often assume she'll use it against them. But Lily is a fairy, with her own abilities, so she probably isn't scared of Alice, which is a relief.

"Alice, you haven't put any pressure on me the whole time I've been here. You're shy and sweet, and I really like you. Let's just eat dinner, talk and see what happens," Lily suggests, and Alice tries to calm her racing heart. She wants more than a fling here, if possible.

"Okay." They serve up the curry and rice and take it to Alice's small table. They eat and drink wine, talking more about their lives, and time passes. They wash up together, and it feels domestic. Then they move to the couch to watch a movie.

Lily is the one who takes the next step and kisses Alice. She all but crawls into Alice's lap, straddling her on the couch as they kiss. Alice is careful with her hands because she doesn't want to damage Lily's wings. She finds a solution both of them seem to like by putting her hands on Lily's round ass.

Lily takes the lead without being aggressive, and Alice likes it. So often girls expect her to lead just because she can sling a grown man over her shoulder like he was a pillowcase. But Lily doesn't seem to have any expectations, and it's nice not having to be the strong and dominant one for a change.

After a little while, Lily reaches for the hem of her dress, bunched around her thighs, and pulls it up and over her body and tosses it aside. She's left in nothing but her panties, and Alice guesses it's hard to wear a bra when you have wings coming out of your back. But that thought flies out of her head when she takes a proper look at Lily. Her beautiful skin

seems to almost glimmer with inner magic, and her amazing pink hair tumbles down her body and over her small, pert breasts.

"You're so beautiful," Alice gasps between kisses.

"So are you. Can I see more of you?" Lily asks, bright blue eyes filled with heat. She lets out a joyful squeal when Alice flips them around so that Lily is laying on her back on the couch with Alice on top of her. Then she starts wiggling out of her clothes with Lily's help.

They make out, slow and deep, exploring each other's bodies. Neither of them seems in a rush to take anything further than this, and it's nice. Alice thinks maybe it's a good idea not to rush head first into deeper intimacy. Alice's already head over heels. She needs to slow down the rush of feelings, but making out in her panties with a gorgeous woman is something she's not saying no to.

They don't stop for a long time, and when they do, Alice turns off the movie. She lends Lily pyjama bottoms and offers to cut a top open for Lily's wings, but she declines and stays topless as they get into bed together. They don't do more than cuddle and kiss, and it feels amazing. Alice falls asleep with her heart full.

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Alice is on a run in the woods, and she realizes by where the sun is in the sky that she'll be late for her second date with Lily if she doesn't hurry up. Luckily, her yeti form can run much faster than a human, which is one of the many reasons that humans don't see them often and only get blurry pictures.

She reaches her home just as Lily gets out of her car with a big canvas, and Alice approaches, trying not to be too quiet and startle her.

"Hello," Alice says in her deeper yeti voice.

"Hi, I'm not late, am I? Can we go inside? I'm a little cold," Lily says, and she looks at Alice like she isn't over six foot tall and covered in shaggy chestnut fur.

"Of course." Alice lets them both inside and leaves Lily to go to her bedroom and change forms and put on fresh clothes. Propped against her dresser mirror is the note and doodle Lily had left her the morning after

their first date. It's a little cartoon of a yeti holding hands with a fairy, and the fairy is kissing the yeti's cheek with a big heart over it.

Alice goes back to her living room. Lily's uncovering the canvas, and Alice stops in her tracks. The painting is of her, but she's never seen herself look like this before, so relaxed and at peace. She looks one with the purple flowers around her.

"Do you like it?" Lily asks.

"Like it? Is it conceited if I love it?" Alice asks.

Lily dashes over to her and hugs her close and buries her face in Alice's neck.

"I'm so glad you like it. I wanted to show you what I saw when I first looked at you in the art gallery," Lily says, kissing her neck.

"You think I look like that?" Alice can hardly believe it.

"Of course, and I knew you didn't see it. I needed you to see it because I'm lousy with words, and I knew I wouldn't be able to tell you right," Lily says softly.

Alice kisses her soundly, lifting Lily off her feet a little, liking her strength for once as it allows her to do this effortlessly.

"Would I offend you if I carried you to my bedroom?" Alice asks.

"No, I think I'd like it."

Alice scoops Lily up bridal style, and Lily giggles and wraps her arms around Alice's neck, her wings brushing Alice's legs. Alice walks them easily to her bedroom and carefully puts Lily on the bed. No one has ever been as sweet to her as Lily has been in their short time so far, and Alice would very much like to keep Lily in her life.

"I thought you wanted to go out to dinner?" Lily teases, pulling Alice down to the bed by the front of her shirt.

"We can make it a late dinner," Alice suggests, kissing Lily's neck, making her moans lightly.

"Make it breakfast, " Lily decides.

Alice grins, wrapping herself around Lily. "I knew you were a smart woman."

"Am I a keeper?" Lily asks, sounding like she's half joking, half serious.

"I'll keep you as long as you want to stay," Alice answers seriously.

"I'm not going anywhere," Lily says and then kisses Alice. Alice only just hears the words over the beating of her heart, but it's not just her heart; it's Lily's and hers in time.

Ode to the Forest Fae

Deep in the heart of an ancient forest, in a large moss-covered oak, Rosepetal has been slumbering for more years than she can count – after a hundred, each year seems to blur into the others. Rosepetal is a forest fae elder, so she is allowed to sleep in the human world instead of the underworld, the mystical realm of the fae below the rich soil.

No one has disturbed Rosepetal for a long time. Until recently, anyway. Someone has entered Rosepetal's forest, their energy slipping into her sleeping mind.

Then the singing had started. The beautiful, haunting voice made Rosepetal want to dance for the first time in centuries. The world seemed beautiful again when the girl sang.

And today, like many before it, Rosepetal hears that sweet voice coming close to the tree that has been her home for so many years, and her heart swells. She lets the branches of the trees dance around her. She sinks her feet into the soil and sends out her energy, causing flowers to bloom and carpet the forest floor.

The girl stops singing with a gasp, and Rosepetal peers out from her hiding spot in the tree. The girl is kneeling on the ground, her bare knees pressing into the earth. She's small in height, curvy like the goddesses of life, with hair shaved close to her head on one side and black locks flowing on the other side, over her shoulder. Her green eyes are wide; her tanned, olive-toned hands are hovering close to one of the large purple blooms.

"W-w-where did you come from?" the girl asks the flower, a stutter noticeable in her voice that had not been there when she sang.

Rosepetal feels nervous, which is ridiculous. She walked this earth before this girl was even born. She's a forest fae, a mystical being of great power. She shouldn't be afraid of showing herself to a human.

Setting her chin, Rosepetal gathers her courage and materialises in her physical form outside of the tree. "I grew them for you," Rosepetal says in answer to the human's question.

The girl startles, almost falling forward. Then she lurches backward, falling on her behind and crawling back a few steps.

"W-who are you? I-I thought I was alone. A-are you, what are you?" The girl looks confused.

It's been a long time since Rosepetal saw herself, but she still remembers what she looks like. Her skin is pale and faintly green, autumn leaves growing out of hair the same shade all the way down her back. She's tall. Her eyes are a bright purple like the flower she had grown.

"I'm Rosepetal. I'm a forest fae, and this is my forest. What's your name?" Rosepetal asks, brushing imaginary dirt off her long brown dress. She feels like a young seedling, fragile and easily crushed.

"L-L-Lisa Road. I, ah, I didn't know it was your forest. I-I can leave." The poor girl, Lisa, looks terrified.

"Lisa," Rosepetal says, testing the name out, liking the way it feels passing her lips. "You don't need to leave; can't you see the forest dancing? It's welcoming you. *I'm* welcoming you." The trees are still swaying with the beat of Rosepetal's heart, the music she still hears, that she longs to hear again. She hopes she hasn't scared Lisa away. Rosepetal has come to look forward to her visits.

"What is a forest fae?" Lisa asks without a stutter. Rosepetal sees her flicking a rubber band on her wrist and wonders if that helps her.

"Your people have called us many things, from gods to fairies. The fae are what came before humans. Once we shared the world with you, but humans came to fear and hate magic, so we retreated to our own land beneath the earth. I'm not a monster. I'm one with all growing things," Rosepetal replies.

"Y-y-you made the flowers grow?" Lisa asks.

"Yes. You gifted my forest with your beautiful voice, so I wanted to give you something beautiful back. Are you a singer by trade?"

"No. M-m-my dad says singing is a waste of time, that I'll never be anybody. I want, I want to go to drama school, t-t-to learn to be in musicals," Lisa explains and then looks surprised at her own words, like she wasn't used to sharing that piece of information.

"Do not worry, little one. Nothing you say in my forest will ever leave it. You're safe here with me, for as long as you want to stay. I don't agree with your father. He's a fool. Your voice is a gift that must be shared," Rosepetal says firmly.

"L-l-little one?" Lisa says, touching her waist and stomach, which are not as thin as a willow, but not as thick as an ancient oak.

"You are young."

"I'm twenty-o-one." Lisa frowns.

"When I was that age, the trees around us were not even seeds. I was on this earth long before then. I've seen much, but I've never heard a voice like yours. Will you sing for me again?" Rosepetal asks.

"You want me to sing?" Lisa blurts out, so shocked it seems she doesn't have time to stutter.

"I'm willing to bargain. Is there something I can do for you if you sing for me?" Rosepetal asks, daring to step closer to Lisa, who's still on the forest floor by the row of purple tulips.

"A-anything I want?" Lisa asks.

"If it is within my power, yes." Rosepetal nods.

"I want a kiss," Lisa says softly.

"From a human? Do you have one in mind?" Rosepetal asks, trying to ignore the ache in her heart. She's not in love with this girl. She's in love with the pain and loneliness in her voice, her words.

"N-n-no. I meant from you," Lisa says.

Rosepetal's heart soars, and tiny little pink flowers sprout at her feet, between her toes. "You want me to kiss you?"

"Yes. You're so beautiful, and I think, when I've come here before, I felt like someone was l-listening to me, but n-not in a bad or scary way. I-I felt understood when I came here, connected to the forest," Lisa says, getting slowly to her feet, so they're standing close now.

"I didn't know you felt it, too. My heart has beat for nothing but this forest for so long, until your voice. I feel like I know you as well as I know the flowers and the trees." Rosepetal puts her hand over her heart, feeling it beat, feeling it call out to the girl in front of her, so much younger than

her, but an adult in human years. Being of the fae, Rosepetal believes in magic of all kinds, including soulmates. She's never had one before, not even before she came to sleep in this forest, and she'd thought love was not for her till she started hearing Lisa singing songs of woe at times, joy at others.

Lisa looks excited and worried all at once. "So I'm not being foolish? I always believed humans couldn't be the only ones in this world. I believed in fairies, but to meet a real fae, for her to be as lovely as you, I feel like I'm g-going c-crazy."

Rosepetal closes the distance between them to nearly nothing, so close she can feel Lisa's body heat, reaching out to her and warming her cool skin. She's always cool in the autumn. She reaches out and cups Lisa's cheek in her hand. "Does my touch feel real? Trust your senses, Lisa. You can see me. You can feel me, yes?" Rosepetal has questioned her own mind before. In the long years sleeping in the forest there had been times when her dreams seemed real, but it wasn't until she heard Lisa sing that she'd actually woken up. The first time she had questioned her sanity, thinking the voice couldn't be real; she doesn't want Lisa to feel that way.

"Y-Y-You feel real, and that scent, is that you?" Lisa asks, inhaling deeply, a smile on her lips. "Flower and plants, pine needles and petrichor?"

"It's me. You like it?" Rosepetal can control how strong her scent is, but she hates focusing on making it go away.

"I love it. I-I wish I could have it as a perfume," Lisa says, and she sways forward slightly as she talks, as if drawn to Rosepetal, leaning into her touch. Rosepetal strokes her soft, warm cheek, savouring the thrum of life beneath it. She can also feel the throb of pleasure in Lisa's body, and knows it's in response to her closeness.

"Would you like that kiss now?" Rosepetal asks.

"P-please," Lisa says, breathing in deeply, her breathing slightly shaky.

Rosepetal closes the gap between them and presses a kiss to Lisa's slightly trembling lips. She no longer hears the birds or the breeze. She doesn't smell the forest. She smells Lisa, a soft, slightly spicy scent. The ground beneath her feet feels like it's moving, spinning in time to her heartbeat, which seems to move faster with every moment, making

Rosepetal dizzy. She wraps her arms around Lisa, and they tumble to the ground, landing on a bed of Rosepetal's namesake.

Lisa gives a delighted gasp, and shyness seemingly gone, Lisa kisses her again. Rosepetal lets her hands explore, finding hair like silk where it's long, and soft and almost fluffy like a baby chick where it's shaved. Lisa has warm skin, and the weight of her body on top of Rosepetal feels more right than any sensation ever has.

Rosepetal draws back, but keeps her arms wrapped firmly around Lisa's waist, her fingers trailing over skin where Lisa's shirt has ridden up, exposing the dip in Lisa's back above the tempting swell of her rear.

"Can you sing like this? I want to hear your voice while you're above me, touching me," Rosepetal requests.

"If I-I lift up on m-m-my arms a little, so my chest has room."

"Sing something old? That Celtic lullaby you sang once; it was what woke me up." Rosepetal strokes Lisa's back as she makes her plea.

Lisa rises up, so she can draw more breath to sing. Looking a little nervous, she starts to sing. Rosepetal doesn't know the exact meaning of the words, despite being older than the song itself. She didn't live with Celts.

Lisa sings, her voice filling the air with its rich alto, and Rosepetal's joy spreads out from her. The leaves turn green on the trees around them. Flowers bloom from lush grass, and in this small patch of forest, it no longer looks like autumn, but spring.

Rosepetal moves her hand slowly, finding the heat between Lisa's legs, making sure her touch is welcome before she continues, making Lisa's voice hitch as she tries to keep singing, only stopping for a moment when orgasm hits.

Lisa finishes her beautiful lullaby and looks down at Rosepetal with wide eyes.

"Y-your hair, the leaves are green, and there are flowers in it now." Lisa reaches out and touches a small pale blue bud.

"I'm happy," Rosepetal explains.

"Because I sang, o-or because I came?" Lisa sounds shocked.

"Because you sang for me, to me, and came for me. My soul has been alone for so long. I was like a seed without the spark needed to grow. You're that spark. Please don't be scared off. I won't try to keep you here," Rosepetal assures. She feels as if she's is in love, but she'd never force Lisa to be with her.

"C-can you leave the forest? I want to see you again. I'll come b-back if you can't leave. I want to get to know you b-b-better. I feel like my h-heart knows yours, but I need to know you," Lisa says softly, and Rosepetal is glad she's not the only one feeling the connection.

"I can leave the forest if I wish, and I want to know you too, to share my life with you." Rosepetal has seen many things in her time on earth, and she'd like to share all the wonders with Lisa. She wants Lisa to see that in all that time, Lisa is the purest, most beautiful person she's ever seen.

"B-but the way you look, p-people will know you're not human. W-what if they hurt you?" Lisa asks, looking genuinely scared. Rosepetal can't remember the last time someone worried about her, if they ever had. Her family had loved her before they went to sleep beneath the earth, but their relationship had been complicated. They never quite seemed to be reading the same book, whereas Rosepetal feels like Lisa, an almost stranger, is on the same page as her, reading the same lines.

"Stand with me," Rosepetal says, and Lisa climbs to her feet, hands out to help Rose to stand as well. They stand together in the circle of each other's arms, and Rosepetal calls on her powers to produce a glamour. The leaves and flowers in her hair turn to copper red curls. Her purple eyes become moss green, and her skin changes to match Lisa's olive-toned skin.

"Y-you can stay this way around other people?" Lisa asks.

"Yes, so if I may, I'd like to take you on a date. Only you're going to have to decide where as I've not left the forest in sometime. I've kept up with the world in ways; things came to me in my dreams. But the world outside this place is mostly a mystery to me." She hasn't thought about it in so long. She'd grown bored with the world, but now she feels less weary, like she's seeing things through new eyes.

"I want to show y-you all my favourite places, b-but when we're alone, can you be you? I like you as a fae," Lisa says shyly.

"Whenever other people are not around, you'll see the real me. Now come, show me your world. I've been sleeping far too long." Rosepetal takes Lisa's hand, and takes her first step away from her tree, her home for so long. It looks like such a lonely place when she looks back, one large tree on its own. Rosepetal uses her powers once again, sending a seed into the ground and giving it the spark to grow. When she glances back, a sapling has begun to grow close to the old oak tree.

Rosepetal thinks she'll be spending a lot of time hand in hand with Lisa, watching this human grow, and her life grow entwined with Lisa's and bloom into beautiful flowers.

The Fae by the Lake

Not everyone gets to have a job they love, but Annie does. She's a nature photographer for a magazine and they've sent her to a lake in the middle of a forest where there had been sightings of some rare flowers.

Annie loved being out in the middle of nowhere with just her camera and a backpack, but she was a little nervous about the lake because she didn't know how to swim. She edged closer to the water and took a snapshot of the cabin on the other side of the lake. She could only imagine how lovely it must be to wake up in that cabin and look out the window to see the sun shining on the blue green water.

She spots a little dock and heads towards it. She can see some flowers toward the centre of the lake and she wants to get closer to take a photograph. The flowers are a dark blue with orange spots, like nothing Annie has seen before.

The old wooden dock creaks beneath Annie's feet and her stomach flips as she gets a bad feeling right before there is an almighty crack. The wood beneath her feet gives out and she is plunged into ice cold water.

Thoughts race through Annie's mind as she sinks, her bag weighing her down. She's alone out here, she hasn't seen a person all day, she can't swim and she's sinking. Water is stinging her eyes, she can hardly see, there are plants wrapping around her leg and it feels as if they're pulling her down.

Her lungs feel like they're going to explode as she holds her breath. It's so cold but she fights, thrashing her limbs. Just as she opens her mouth, letting in more water she sees something – or maybe someone – moving in the water toward her.

She thinks she must be hallucinating when she sees a woman with blue hair and gossamer wings cutting through the water towards her like a dolphin. She can't be real, she's too beautiful to be real, but then the blue-haired woman's hands close around her forearms and when they start pulling her up, she kicks because she wants to help. The woman is strong and a good swimmer, pulling Annie back up from the deep until they break the surface.

"Just hold on to me, I'll get you to the edge. You can't swim, can you?" The woman has a beautiful voice, musical and with an accent unlike any Annie has heard before. Her skin is fish-belly pale with a blue tinge, and her wings are a shimmery blue.

Annie is half-convinced she has drowned and this is some kind of afterlife – as a bi woman, being rescued by a beautiful woman is a great dream to have – but she holds on anyway. They swim toward the edge of the lake together and the woman helps her out of the water. Annie stands, camera somehow still around her neck and bag heavy and wet on her back. She stands there shivering in the weak midday sun and looks at the woman, still there, still real, and not shivering.

"Are you okay? Can you breathe?" The woman reaches out and gently pats Annie's back.

"I can breathe, you saved my life, I can't swim, and my bag was so heavy, it all happened so fast. This is a rude question, but what are you?" Annie says in a rush.

"I'm a water fae. We've kept hidden from most of the world for a long time, but now the time has come to reveal ourselves. But even if I was still hiding, I had to come to your aid. I couldn't let someone drown in my lake. I'm the guardian here; I protect the lake and all that is in it. I saw you looking around and thought I'd come say hello, but you'd already fallen." She brushes back her lovely blue-green hair; it looks like a rippling wave of water.

But her words are a lot to process, and Annie thinks she might be in shock because she doesn't question that something she thought was a myth is here and real in the world, right in front of her.

She shivers, still freezing cold. "Thank you for saving me."

"Come to my cabin, you can put your clothes in my dryer and warm up. It's a chilly day, okay for my kind to be in the water, but not yours."

"That would be very kind of you. Uh, my name is Annie. " Annie asks as they start walking.

"Lily, like the flower. We'll have you warm in no time, but may I ask what brought you here? This lake was much neglected when I found it, not many people have come to visit since then, and you're not from town." Lily reaches out and Annie stumbles at the same time and is caught by

Lily. The blue tinge to her skin makes Annie think of cold things, but her touch is warm.

"Thank you again. I'm a photographer. The magazine I freelance for sent me here to take pictures of all the beautiful wildlife that's been spotted."

Lily nods. "I had hoped my efforts would bring people back to the lake. It was a sacred place to my people, long forgotten by yours."

"The flowers, you grew them?" Annie guesses.

"Yes, I did. Do you like them?"

They finally reach the cabin and Annie is glad because she's so cold, she wants to warm up, but mostly she's captivated by Lily and her magic. It's not every day you get to meet someone who could fit right in to your childhood story books.

"I love them, I was trying to get a picture of them when I fell."

Lily opens the door. "I have vases of flowers in my home, maybe you can take pictures if your camera still works?"

"Thank you, that's really kind." Annie follows Lily into the cabin and it's a beautiful space, full of colours and flowers, lots of pillows and blankets. Her camera is toast, so she's upset, but her camera was insured, and she can get most of the money back; she's mostly relieved she's alive and with a beautiful fae.

"I'll get you a robe to wear while your clothes dry. It's just me here, so no one will watch you change – apart from me if you ask nicely." Lily smiles over her shoulder, heading for what Annie guesses is the bedroom.

Annie hesitates. She wants to get out of the wet clothes, but she's not used to strangers flirting with her and she’s sure that's what Lily was just doing. Lily, who has paused in the doorway.

"I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable, forgive me. I spend most of my time alone here working on bringing life back to the forest and water. I forget not everyone is as forward as me. I meet a beautiful woman and I flirt. I would never touch you if you didn't want me to, and I won't take advantage of you being here," Lily promises.

"It’s fine, I was just surprised." Annie dumps her wet backpack and starts peeling off her clothes as Lily walks into her bedroom.

Lily comes back with a fluffy blue robe when Annie is in her underwear. Lily doesn't stare, just hands over the robe. Annie puts it on and then takes the remaining wet articles off under the terry cloth cover.

"It's okay, you can look now," Annie smiles and when Lily looks back up her sparkling blue eyes are so beautiful, and Annie feels a gut punch of lust that makes her knees feel weak.

Lily looks pleased. "I can take your clothes to the dryer?"

"Yes, thank you." Annie picks up the pile and hands them over.

Lily disappears into another room again and calls out from there. "Would you like some tea to warm you?"

"Yes please," Annie calls back. She's feeling warmer now she's inside and out of her wet clothes, but she's still not comfortably warm.

"I have cinnamon tea if you like, it's very warming,"

"Sounds lovely." Annie is grateful for Lily even though a part of her is convinced she died in the lake or is unconscious and this is all a dream, because can a fae be real? Lily is so beautiful, unlike any person Annie has ever seen. She seems real, the way she talks and moves; it all seems so real, so Annie has decided she'll just go with it and try to stop questioning everything. If Lily is real, it means Annie is alive and that is the outcome she wants.

Lily comes back with cups of tea and places the cups on her coffee table. Annie comes over in her borrowed robe and sits. When Lily does the same on the couch, Annie notices Lily's wings disappearing with a shimmer.

"Your wings?" Annie blurts hoping she's not been rude.

"They get crushed when I sit if I don't use my magic. Fae can look human if we wish, which is part of why we have been able to hide for so long, but it's uncomfortable; it doesn't feel natural to dress in a human guise. Would you be more comfortable if I looked human? I can do that for you if you wish," Lily offers, sipping her tea, which reminds Annie to take a sip.

The hot liquid warms her throat and chest and Annie shakes her head. "No, don't change. You're beautiful as you are, and I wouldn't want you to be uncomfortable."

"Thank you. Would you like me to dry your hair?"

"You have a hair dryer?" It would be nice to get her sopping wet hair dry, so it stopped clinging coldly to her face and neck.

"Not exactly." Lily raises a hand. "Can I?"

"Okay."

Annie is a little nervous about having magic used on her, worried it'll hurt or go wrong, but something in her trusts Lily, maybe because Lily had saved her life and trusted Annie with her secret. Lily holds her hand close to Annie's hair and moves it up and down and Annie can feel something, a change in the air, nothing painful or scary, just a tingle and within seconds her hair is bone dry.

"Thank you so much. That must come in handy if you like to swim," Annie smiles.

Lily looks thoughtful. "I don't mind my hair wet. I don't feel the cold, and I swim on the coldest mornings if the lake isn't too frozen."

"Your hair is beautiful," Annie can't help blurting out. She picks her tea up and drinks to hide her face, hoping Lily will think the blush on her cheeks is due to the steam and heat of the fragrant tea.

"So is yours. It's how I first spotted you, that flash of red like a fox darting about my woods. I don't like how foxes get called sly; they are kind and smart, sweet creatures and so brave. You remind me a little of a fox," Lily says with a warm smile.

Annie laughs. "I've been called foxy before but never an actual fox."

"Foxy?" Annie cocks her head looking slightly confused.

"It means sexy."

"Oh, well then yes you are very foxy." Lily nods and Annie blushes. "You're like a delicate cherry blossom, always blushing pink," Lily says with a twinkle in her eye.

"I feel like a tongue-tied school kid; it's just not every day you almost drown and are saved by a beautiful and magical fae. I find myself quite captivated with you, and I don't know what to do about it," Annie admits.

Lily lifts her hand slowly, giving Annie time to stop her, and brings her hand to rest on the robe over Annie's chest. "What does your heart say to

you? Listen to the whispers between beats and see what it wants…"

Annie would swear she can feel the warmth of Lily's hand through the thick robe. She finds herself closing her eyes as she tries to do as Lily said and listen to her heart instead of the frantic thoughts in her head that are telling her she's being foolish. Her heart aches and sings; it wants, oh how it wants to feel life close to it, to feel a heartbeat close to its own.

"How do I know you want the same? This is so rash, today has been like none I've had before. I nearly died and now I'm here with you, and you're so beautiful and I want to be close to you. Does this even make sense?" Annie hasn't had a lot of one night stands. She doesn't rush into things, but since work means she's always moving, always somewhere new, she has to take chances where and when they come. Something in her is telling her to take a chance here, that she won't regret her choice.

"I didn't mean to cause you stress. I get lonely here, you're lovely and interesting, and I would enjoy more of your company. But if that would not make you happy, we can talk instead. I don't often get the chance to simply talk with another person," Lily says.

"Can I kiss you?" Annie blurts.

Lily smiles. "Yes, I would like that."

Annie leans in and does so; Lily's lips are slightly cool, but still spark warmth in Annie's chest and lower in her core. Lily slides an arm around Annie's waist; she can feel the weight of it above the bathrobe.

She moves her hand from where they have been glued to her lap and uses gentle touches to draw Lily closer, to feel the strip of skin showing on her stomach in the halter top worn presumably to allow room for wings. Annie runs her fingers back and forward over the slight swell of Lily's stomach and the skin over flesh is so soft, like fine silk. Lily gives a happy sigh into Annie's mouth and her hands start to do their own exploring, but Lily seems bolder, sliding her graceful hands under slightly rough cloth to stroke up Annie's ribcage to her breasts and feels her nipples peak.

With slightly clumsy hands Annie finds the ties of Lily's top and undoes them, both of them catching fire, lust in their veins as they quickly strip each other and stand. Lily offers a hand and leads the way to her bedroom. Annie feels bold walking through a stranger's home nude, but she feels oddly unselfconscious around Lily.

Lily's room is full of the scent of different fresh flowers, and there are even stray petals on the bed as they lay down together, and without even trying it feels like the most romantic setting for sex Annie has ever had. Bright light streams into the room and it feels decadent, no shadows to hide in and it feels good.

"I want to please you," Lily says as their lips part, hot breath fanning between them.

"You're already doing that." Annie giggles, feeling breathless as Lily starts kissing a path down her body. Her skin had still been damp and cold, but the last of the chill leaves her with every touch Lily gifts.

Lily settles between Annie's legs and teases with lips and tongue; usually Annie would feel self-conscious sprawled naked with a stranger between her thighs, but it feels so natural with Lily. So Annie lays back and just lets pleasure send her heartbeat racing as each touch brings another level of pleasure.

Eventually, though, Annie feels selfish and so, taking charge, she moves on the bed so that she can give Lily the same pleasure she is receiving.

The waves of pleasure rise and fall, crashing like waves. Eventually Annie has to roll away because her body is shaking, too sensitive for any more and Lily takes charge this time, moving around till they both have their heads on the pillow and a blanket laying over them. On the pillows blue and red hair mix and it should clash but to Annie it looks beautiful – she aches for the camera she had left in the other room along with her soaked bag.

Lily touches Annie's cheek gently. "Can I ask you something?"

"Of course."

"I know you have a life away from here, but could you spare just today? Stay with me and let me show you the beauty here?"

Annie hesitates, but not because she doesn't want to stay. "I'm afraid if I stay a day I'll never want to leave."

"You can leave at any time. You can also come back; you're always welcome. I would like to get to know you more." Lily smiles. Annie loves the way Lily seems to see things differently: no games, no stress, no social constructs.

Annie thinks for a moment. "I can stay a day or two, as long as I take some photographs of the flowers,"

"We can get your photos and I will make sure you come to no harm this time," Lily says, coming closer.

Annie takes the clear offer and kisses Lily as soft as if she were kissing the petals of a flower she didn't want to mark.

"I have much to show you," Lily says against Annie's mouth, and Annie would swear the blooms in the room grow, sprout new buds, and unfurl new petals.

FIN

About the Author

LJ is a disabled queer writer in her late twenties, she loves writing all kinds of different books with a romance twist and has been writing all her life. Writing can often be hard due to pain but can also often be an escape from it and it’ll always be part of her life.